THE CHANGING NATURE OF INTRA-STATE CONFLICT:
THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONNECTION

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20041208 057

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September 1994

PREFACE

This paper was presented by the author at The Leadership Workshop on Environment and Security, sponsored by the Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Studies on September 16-18, 1994, at New Haven. Support for this workshop was provided by the Department of the Army. The purpose of the workshop was to examine the interface between the traditional domain of national security studies and the growing impact of environmental considerations on national security strategy.

Two RAND staff members attended the conference: David Rubenson and the author. Rubenson directs the environmental studies program at RAND and the author (together with RAND colleague Mary Morris) had prepared an overview of the workshop topic in 1993 (published in 1994).

The paper presented here relies heavily on RAND research on intra-state conflict conducted for the Army in 1993-94. While environmental causality of intra-state conflict was not a specific focus of that research, it became apparent during the course of our work that environmental factors were important--particularly if one expands the scope of environmental analysis to include population migration and economic impoverishment issues. The author acknowledges his intellectual indebtedness on these topics to Arnold Kanter, Meg Harrell, Tom Szayna, Brian Nichiporuk, Ashley Tellis, Carl Builder, Bob Howe, and Ben Schwarz of RAND.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF INTRA-STATE CONFLICT:
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by James A. Winnefeld[1]

First off, I need to hoist my true colors: I am a national security studies analyst, not an expert on environmental issues. I note that most of the attendees at this workshop have the word "environment" or a related phrase in their titles or in the names of their home offices or institutions. There are relatively fewer of us here that represent the national security strategy domain. With these points in mind, my purpose is to provide a point of view that is somewhat different from that of environmental studies researchers and policymakers--with the objective of helping to provide analytical balance to our discussions. Consequently, some of the points that I will make may jar some sensitivities, display a degree of naivete, or even be just plain wrong. I ask you to accept these shortcomings as the price to be paid for joining the two subjects that comprise the focus of this workshop.

This said, you might well ask how I got interested in the topic of this workshop. The answer is that as a specialist in national security strategies I have, over the past five years, become struck by two phenomena: (1) national security strategists and environmental analysts or advocates either don't talk to one another or talk past one another, and (2) environmental security issues are starting in important ways to shape the domain and limit the options that are available to national security strategists. One cannot today put bases where one pleases, use weapons that one prefers (from a purely military effectiveness standpoint), against targets that one might select, or be insensitive to the environment in applying military force. In World War II, we bombed dams, oil fields, and deliberately targeted civilian populations and infrastructure in ways that would be unthinkable today. The point is

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[1]James Winnefeld is a resident consultant for national security studies with RAND. This paper states his personal views and should not be construed to represent the views of RAND or its research sponsors.

that willy-nilly the national security strategist must be aware of the environmental dimension of the application of force if he is to do his job.

To further the purposes of this workshop, I have been asked to examine the environmental roots of intra-state conflict. This topic is of considerable interest to me because I am a member of a RAND research team that just finished a study for the Army on the subject of what intra-state conflict means for the Army of the future. A natural extension of that work would be think about the environmental connection. My paper addresses changes in the conflict setting over the past ten years, its effects on the motivations and forms of intra-state conflict, the possible environmental dimensions of such conflict, and the opportunities and pitfalls that may lie ahead as national security and environmental security strategists grapple with related issues. I should confess up front that I see many more questions than answers at the intersection of intra-state conflict, environmental degradation, and the limits of U.S. will and power in developing a forward-looking and feasible security strategy.

THE CHANGING MOTIVATIONS FOR INTRA-STATE CONFLICT

That said, it is undeniable that we are witnessing a major transition in the sources of conflict. The ideological motivations of the Cold War are quickly receding except for a few tawdry cases such as North Korea, Kampuchea, and Cuba. The new conflicts flow from both historical and newly emerging tensions based on ethnic (including religious), nationalist, and separatist factors. These factors, many long held in check by the "discipline" of the Cold War, are now given full scope to work their mischief. Whereas during the Cold War we were concerned with "hearts and minds" issues—winning over a population to a different ideological point of view, now we see wars being waged over the question who people are and where they live as much as for what they believe.

Many of these tensions have been of long standing and were suppressed by the super-powers during the Cold War to reduce the potential for conflict escalation. Some see this reappearance of

ethnic and nationalist conflict as part of a longer cycle: the swing between the international emphasis on state sovereignty (as reflected in the UN Charter and the dictates of the Cold War) and the emphasis on national self-determination (as demonstrated by the post World War I treaties and the aftermath of the Cold War).[2] Regardless, new and old forces are at work to destabilize what we so recently had called the "New World Order." The new forces include the just mentioned fracture of social and political cohesion across ethnic or national lines. The old forces include population growth and ongoing environmental destruction.

POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS

The failure of the Soviet Union as a state and the subsequent unraveling of most communist regimes ended the Cold War and changed the terms of global power rivalries. Major powers now find that they have both lower stakes and lower risks in regional conflicts. The threat of escalation to global nuclear war is at least temporarily in remission. At the same time, intra-state conflict has mushroomed—and their effects have entered our living room via our television sets. The combination of these related phenomena has resulted in a greater willingness of the world community, led by the major powers, to intervene in intra-state conflict. Indeed, these powers have come to recognize a commonality of interests in intervening.[3] If one interprets "intervention" broadly to include international pressure short of armed force, related activities have achieved a scope that is much wider than that experienced during the Cold War and include:

- Protecting human rights (as in Haiti, China, Timor, and Myanmar)
- Alleviating suffering (Somalia, Rwanda, Ethiopia)

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[2] See J. Samuel Barkin and Bruce Cronin, "The State and the Nation: Changing Norms and the Rules of Sovereignty in International Relations," *International Organization*, Winter 1994, pp. 107-130.

[3] Each hopes someone else will undertake (and pay for) the dirty work of actually intervening.

- Responding to nuclear proliferation threats (North Korea, South Africa, India-Pakistan)

- Stopping drug trafficking (South America and Southeast Asia)

- Controlling population growth (UN Conference on Population and Development)

- Protecting the environment (forestry practices in Southeast Asia and Brazil, maritime pollution, fishing practices).

This is not to say that these efforts have been successful—obviously, they have not—but a start has been made. They now hit page 1 instead of page 10. To appreciate the breadth of change, one has only to compare this expanded coverage with the narrow political-military considerations that drove nearly every international conference during the Cold War. In spite of the erratic and occasionally overreaching performance of the UN, international institutions are slowly but steadily becoming stronger. The evidence is all around us. Compare the G-7, the European Union, the GATT, ASEAN, APEC, and the UN and where they are today to where they were ten years ago.[4]

NOT ONLY ARE THE ROOTS OF CONFLICT CHANGING, THE FORM IS CHANGING ALSO

Changes in the sources and bounds of conflict are also changing its dimensions and intensity. What is different between intra-state conflict today and such conflict ten years ago? I would offer the following:

1. A marked decrease in emphasis on winning "hearts and minds" and more on gaining controlling territory—ejecting or eliminating "undesirable" inhabitants if necessary[5]

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[4]The NATO case is less clear as it is still seeking a new mission. However, the cautious expansion of the NATO mission to include out of area tasks (and combat missions in support of peace operations) and the establishment of partnership for peace associates suggests major changes in, and a strengthening of, NATO.

[5]Controlling territory was the last step in the Communist strategy. First, the governing institutions had to be weakened and the support of the population gained. Territorial control was the last step, not the first as we have seen in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Somalia.

2. An increase in the types of conflict to include religious, ethnic, nationalist, separatist, and tribal considerations

3. An increasing urbanization of conflict as rural populations grow, are impoverished (in part by environmental degradation), and migrate to the cities

4. An increased diffusion of revolutionary leaderships: few hierarchies, loss of central control, more "loose cannon" actors

5. An increase in the ferocity of conflict as the survival of populations are threatened and war becomes a "battle to the knife"; the long term has been put firmly aside in pursuit of short term gain or survival

6. An associated disregard for the actions and beliefs of the international community (genocide in Kampuchea, Rwanda, Somalia, Bosnia; random killing of foreigners by Muslim fundamentalists in Egypt and Algeria).

A backdrop to these characteristics is the changing population profile in many conflict regions. Largely unrestrained population growth has resulted in lowering the average age of the inhabitants of many important states. This involves problems of its own. As Frances Cairncross points out: "Teen-aged populations are unlikely to be easy to negotiate with."[6] In short, conflicts seem harder to end because their causes of conflict are more deep rooted than a perhaps transient ideology, and the actors are in many cases younger and less willing to compromise.

While much in intra-state conflict has changed over the past ten years, much remains the same. Elites struggle to keep or gain power. They still attempt to appeal at the most basic levels to their followers. Insurgency and terrorism remain the most prevalent forms of violence. The combatants still try to get outside powers involved to help them win. There is still a high potential for spillover of conflict beyond its original borders as refugees are created, access to

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[6]Frances Cairncross, "Environmental Pragmatism," *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1994, p. 38.

resources is denied, or the world community becomes sufficiently outraged to take some action. And protection of the environment is still way down the list of the goals of the competing parties.

But it is the changes in the motivations and forms of conflict that should engage our attention as we examine the means to bring our national security strategy and environmental protection strategies "in sync."

WHAT IS THE ENVIRONMENTAL "CONNECTION" WITH TODAY'S INTRA-STATE CONFLICT?

Let me lead into this discussion by describing some research that I mentioned earlier. RAND has conducted a study for the Army on the changing nature of intra-state conflict and what it means for that service. As part of this effort, we identified about 30 current or possible (even likely) future conflicts. For example:

- Major intra-state conflict is underway or imminent in these areas: Former Yugoslavia, Algeria, Kurdistan, Kampuchea, Angola, the various Caucasus states of the former Soviet union, Tadjikistan, Afghanistan, the Sudan, and Rwanda.[7]

- Lesser, but desperate, intra-state struggles are underway or threatened in: Timor, the Indo-Pakistani border regions, Sri Lanka, Peru, Guatemala, Honduras, Spain, Haiti, Somalia, the Philippines, and Columbia.

- Intra-state conflicts, currently in abeyance but with a high reignition potential, exist in South Africa, Northern Ireland, Yemen, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Lebanon, and Israel (PLO).

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[7]With a somewhat longer horizon, some would add China to this list as the threat of a post-Deng succession, economic dislocation, and population unrest may combine to result in armed conflict. See two papers (by Vaclav Smil and Jack A. Goldstone) in Occasional Paper Number 2, December 1992, on Project Environmental Change and Acute Conflict, a joint project of the University of Toronto and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Also Michael D. Swaine, *The Political and Military Succession in China*, RAND, Santa Monica, 1992.

Of these, some 30 examples six have religious antecedents, eight have other ethnic or nationalist/separatist antecedents, seven have ideological antecedents (based largely on distribution of economic benefits), five have tribal antecedents, and three do not fit any of these categories. This simple, even simplistic, sorting puts aside the fact that many of these conflicts have or will have multiple causes—some of which may be environmental in nature. For example, I see some important environmental antecedents in the Sudan, Indian-Pakistan, Philippines, Sudan, Peru, Somalia, and China cases. But a look at the *immediate* causes of the conflicts past, present, and future does not show a clear and preeminent environmental connection.[8] However, let me quickly point out that the existence or visibility of the environmental connection depends critically on how broadly one defines the domain of environmental issues, and how far back one goes to look for causes.

I draw two somewhat simple points from this summary:

1. From the perspective of most national security analysts, most (perhaps three quarters) of the conflicts examined have few observable basic environmental roots or catalysts.

2. That does not mean that such roots or catalytic relationships do not exist—only that they may lie further up the causal stream or that such roots are masked by the sheer magnitude of other factors.[9]

If this formulation is correct, it means that caution is indicated in making the connection between the incidence of bad wars and bad environmental practices—avoiding the pitfalls of catastrophism on one

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[8]Many assert there is a connection, but provide more inferences than direct evidence to support their argument. For example, see Kent Hughes Butts, *NATO Contributions to European Environmental Security*, U.S. Army War College, December 30, 1993. See also background papers prepared for this workshop (pp. 18-19-23).

[9]For example, part of the appeal of the religious fundamentalists in the Algerian civil war is the history of mismanagement of the economy under the current regime. This mismanagement has included accelerated depletion of natural resources and the continued erosion of agricultural cropland all in the presence of a growing and disgruntled population.

hand and smugness on the other. The subject of causality will be discussed later at this conference when we examine approaches to modeling conflict and its antecedents. Suffice it to say here that the subject is complex, imperfectly understood, and the subject of some considerable controversy.

PERILS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The shift from the Cold War to what we call the "post-Cold War era" has some dangers and opportunities as we strive to protect a fragile environment from both the causes and effects of conflict. The bad news is that there are more entities tearing away at the fabric of the world's environment. They are driven by widely varied, strong and mostly long standing motivations—often based on what is seen as necessary to survival. They are led by impatient, often uncompromising leaderships who themselves are subject to internal splits and failures of control and subordination. Their time horizon is short, not going beyond the next coup, ambush or genocidal act or—in a more charitable sense—beyond the next meal. You will not get much response to environmental appeals in Rwanda or Bosnia—and there are more of such conflicts in the wake of the Cold War. One experienced a feeling of the bizarre when we saw adjacent news stories last month about the starvation among Rwandan refugees and international concern about tracking and protecting equatorial gorillas fleeing the conflict.

The good news is that the major powers freed from the imperatives and urgencies of the Cold War, have an opportunity to turn their attention to longer range matters. There is some evidence that they are responding to this opportunity afforded by the end of the Cold War—and most of us would say not a minute too soon. The Rio Conference on the environment, the just concluded Cairo conference on Population and Development, the flurry of diplomatic activities on nuclear proliferation, renewed interest on the Law of the Sea treaty, the increased sensitivity of the world community to unsound fishing practices and oil pollution seem to point towards future concrete actions. Absent the Cold War zero sum approach to issues, more major

power cooperation seems to be at hand. But there are two dangers to
this increased attention in my view:

- We may focus on the symptoms and not the underlying problems,
  the symptoms often being brought to public attention by intra-
  state conflicts that will seem to pose intractable problems.
- We will attempt to impose our goals on others who can less
  afford them—and we will be unwilling to pay the price to help
  fill the shortfall.

This focus on the immediately observable (and often superficial),
the U.S. penchant for exhorting others to do what they cannot afford,
and our unwillingness to provide costly assistance, leads to the
probability of a misunderstanding of the problem and a disjuncture
between goals and strategies for achieving them. We face this problem
in deciding whether to intervene or not in intra-state conflict—witness
the protracted agonies experienced by the Clinton administration in
deciding to act on the Haitian problems—and in deciding what can be done
about environmental issues that extend beyond our shores. In both
cases, we need lofty goals to provide a compass for action, but
strategies must deal with reality if they are to be effective. I find
myself in some agreement with Frances Cairncross when she observes "It
is not clear that the rich countries can do much to prevent [further
environmental] degradation [overseas]" and that "the most important
contribution that rich countries can make to environmental security is
to behave wisely at home."[10]

So where do I come down on defining the connection between the
changing form of intra-state conflict and environmental degradation? I
would suggest that it goes along the following lines:

- We seem to have avoided the more serious catastrophe of global
  nuclear war at the price of suffering through a more likely
  series of less serious intra-state conflicts.

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[10]Cairncross, op. cit., pp. 46, 52.

- The combination of an increased incidence and diversity of intra-state conflict seems to have its roots principally in other than environmental factors.
- But environmental factors (including such up-stream considerations as uncontrolled population growth) seems to be acting as an "accelerator" and catalyst for intra-state conflict whose causes lie elsewhere—but precise judgments on causality and probability of occurrence are not attainable.
- A two-pronged national security strategy is needed to deal with the causes and the effects of intra-state conflict:
  - A short-term component that involves selected interventions based on our vital interests--which will on occasion and not without controversy include both humanitarian and environmental considerations
  - A long-term component that involves tackling the upstream causes of environmental problems that can foster or exacerbate (if not cause) intra-state conflict.

This long-term component gets us back to the causality question that we will address later in the workshop. Everyone has their own list of candidates for remedies for fundamental causes. It is safe to say that population control is high on most lists. Let me add a few other candidates that do not receive as much attention *in the environmental protection context*:

1. Improvements in power generation efficiency
   - To reduce air pollution and acid deposition
2. Improvements in water management
   - To reduce soil erosion and use of marginal and fragile cropland; to increase crop production; to enhance power generation capacity; and to protect fisheries
3. Removal of international trade barriers
   - To reduce the cost of products and inefficient production practices
4. Improvements in human rights

— To remove some of the sources of conflict and

support development of an electorate more oriented

to longer term (including environmental) concerns.

5. Countering nuclear proliferation

- To help remove a major threat to the environment, and just

as importantly, encourage the diversion of the associated

resources to more productive purposes--some of which

include economic development and environmental

preservation.

The U.S. government is pursuing #3, 4, and 5 for many reasons—few of which are environmentally-based. Regardless of motivations, there should be a positive environmental spinoff. It is doing little in #1 and #2 because there is no domestic constituency for them. It may be here, in these unglamorous areas, where the U.S. government and international institutions should target their environmental preservation efforts.[11] Both lend themselves to the types of technical analysis and innovative solutions that have long been U.S. national strengths.

Let me conclude with these observations that bear on the larger purposes--and I would suggest the ultimate success--of the workshop.

First, as we go on to address causality modeling questions, I see a tension between the search for comprehensiveness and relevance on the one hand and analytic tractability on the other. I would argue for simplicity rather than completeness first. We can expand and add detail later. We always run the risk of having our models rejected by those who believe our version does not accommodate their concerns. I believe that risk is acceptable, because ultimately we have to not only believe in our models but we have to convey their meaning and implications to a larger audience. That larger audience is necessary to acceptance--that vital ingredient of getting things done in the real world.

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[11]See Marcus W. Brouchli, "China's Environment is Seriously Stressed as its Industry Surges," *Wall St. Journal*, July 25, 1994, pp. 1, A8.

Secondly, I would urge some caution as we attempt to develop causality models. We are attempting something very difficult: modeling environmentally-based conflict (and assumptions about that conflict) without an overarching model of conflict in general. Most of my national security analyst colleagues are convinced that there are many things that cause conflict besides enviromental depredations. A sound context is needed for situating the environmental causality models.[12] If, as appears likely, an agreed context is not available, we need to carefully identify the assumptions that locate our model in the domain of analysis.

Finally, I am struck by the degree to which the environmental security domain is the almost exclusive concern of researchers and staff. Line managers responsible for implementing policies are rarely present at workshops like this. We risk ending up talking to ourselves--people with like interests on the importance of the problem, even if not agreeing to all the solutions--until we have implementers present. It is the conceit of many of the "staff" that they *are* implementers. They are in the sense that they set define issues, set priorities, and get funding. But these functions, as important as they are, are not "real" until they are implemented. And to be implemented effectively, the policies and priorities have to be internalized by line managers. To believe otherwise is to believe that exhortation is sufficient for action. The history of the environmental and other high-minded movements shows that the truth is otherwise.

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[12]This is what my colleague Mary Morris and I attempted to do in establishing a matrix between environmental phenomena and regional security problems. See James A. Winnefeld and Mary E. Morris, *Where Environmental Concerns and Security Strategies Meet: Green Conflict in Asia and the Middle East*, RAND, MR-378-RC, 1994, pp. 13-16, 55-59, 69-74. Much more work needs to be done in this area to build on, improve, or substitute for the methods we suggest.